Dive Inside The Auton Infinity

Five is 42. Forty-2 is 2. 42 is Forty-2.

TIM FOLEY
SEP 11, 2024

9

Share

I was going to post this on the actual anniversary - because I'm cute - but then I put my head down to scribble some further TARDIS troubles for all you lovely people... and I think I've missed it? Has it been? Is it coming?

The cropped artwork for THE AUTON INFINITY by the wonderful Ryan Aplin.

In celebration of THE AUTON INFINITY, I thought I'd rake up some interesting tidbits about the making/writing of. I did something similar for my River Song box set a while back. If I was really on it, I would've tried to stay thematic and give you **Forty Two Facts About Forty 2** but I fear towards the end I'd really be scraping the barrel. ('38. This script used WORDS' etc etc.)

So you're getting 9 instead.

Thanks for reading The Listening Post!
Subscribe for free to receive new posts and
support my work.

Type your email... Subscribe

*N.B. There will be **SPOILERS** for the entire adventure, so if you haven't listened to it yet, grab a copy and enjoy! It's good, I promise!*

I was asked to write a six-parter - before I'd even written a four-parter. I will never stop singing the praises of (producer) David Richardson for the many opportunities he has given me over the years. And here, right back at the beginning of my Who-ness, he took a risk by offering this fresh-faced writer a three-hour slot on the basis of a couple of one-hour stories (neither of which are still out yet I believe!). But then, I've come to learn that Mr Richardson is pretty wonderful like that.

This was originally a Sixth Doctor story. Feels odd now, but when I was first asked to pitch, it wasn't for Five and it wasn't for any kind of birthday celebration. But that's not the weirdest thing about this story's genesis…

This was my take on YELLOW FEVER (AND HOW TO CURE IT). Yes!! I was asked to put my own spin on the mythical unmade story from the 80s. Perhaps some of you cottoned on to that already - if so, well done, have a plastic daffodil.

Think about it, we've got the Master, the Brigadier, the Autons… I was asked to avoid Singapore so I thought it would be fun to set it in Snowdonia. It'd featured on the show a number of times but never as actual Snowdonia. Little did I know how beneficial that setting would be later down the line.

I daren't dig out the original pitch, but I do recall the Sixth Doctor and Peri rock up at a 'dummy invasion', much like THE AUTON INFINITY, but then the story got very weird after Part 02. I think the Autons were looking for a cure for some plague, there was some 'reality machine' that turned the cardboard cut-outs in the model village into real monsters, and I'm pretty sure I killed off the Doctor. It's the kind of thing that Sydney Newman would've scribbled 'Nuts!' on.

My in-person meeting for this project was the last thing I did before lockdown. There the Forty gang gathered - Fitton, Dorney and Grochala - at the Wellcome Collection cafe as I waited for a Euston train. I know I had cake because I always have cake, my process needs crumbs. We had no idea what the world had in store for us. But it was at this meeting that I learnt…

We could finally have the Ainley Master. Eek! The casting choice of Culshaw defined THAT cliffhanger, and also helped shape the story structure - it would be important for the actor's sake that we limit the number of scenes the Brig and Master shared together.

Our favourite cackling villain was originally intended to be a surprise, hence the first episode cliffhanger - but frankly, 'giving the game away about the Master's return' was probably more true to the 80s than we could've hoped for. On that point…

Returning monsters ahoy. One query I've seen about the Forty sets is our use of old monsters from the 60s and 70s, instead of villains from the 80s. That's completely intentional! Think about Season 20 and THE FIVE DOCTORS, the way that period snatched back at its past and put a new spin on those foes. Fandom was obsessed with TOMB OF THE CYBERMEN at the time (as seen with '85's ATTACK); the Ice Warriors rocked up in the 'Doctor Who And The Monsters' repeats as one of the most popular monsters; and the Autons were so ingrained in fan consciousness that they almost appeared in the 20th Anniversary themselves (more on that later).

This of course raises the evergreen point about whether audios should be trying to recreate an era or expand on it. I think they can do both. Sometimes you tip one side of the scale of this a little more, depending on what you're attempting. For a birthday party like this, it's natural to be nostalgic.

Dorney taught me the basics of Long-Form Who. Look, we all know John Dorney is a remarkable writer, but he's also full of pearls of wisdom. He gave me lots of good advice about structuring a six-part Who. A couple I'll share with you are:

- propel the story forward with strong cliffhangers;
- don't feel like you need to treat it as one six-part story i.e. imagine it as 2+4 or 2+2+2;

- the writing is going to feel like it's never gonna end, but it will! I believe it was during the writing of this audio - largely in fear of the tremendous word count - that I nailed my '2000 words a day' approach to Doctor Who audios. And look, not all 2000 words that day are gonna be a winner, but as a hero of mine said, 'Don't get it right - get it written.'

The THE FIVE DOCTORS connection was not in the original pitch. When you're at the final scripting stage, you've done all kinds of outlines and scene breakdowns - but I think it's still important to let yourself make discoveries along the way. We're not painting by numbers; there are twists and turns for the writer too!

Case in point - Prodigal's stolen Vortex Driller was always a stolen Time Lord ship, but I'd had no idea how they'd got it. The Master nicked it, that's all we needed to know. Then by chance (probably because I was thinking about the Snowdonian location) I remembered the lost scene of the Third Doctor and Sarah facing Autons in the Death Zone from the 20th anniversary special. How narked would those dummies be if they were dragged all that way and it didn't even happen? It folded into the themes of separation so beautifully that I now can't imagine the story without this link.

We wanted all the TV companions across the FORTY mini-series… and David and Dorney had to really push for us to get that Peri appearance right at the very end. I believe it was picked up in a different recording session by Scott Handcock.

This scene is set right before THE CAVES OF ANDROZANI. Lots of people have asked me if the Auton Doctor still lingers - specifically, if that's the explanation as to why the Doctor only remembers his friends from the TV series during his regeneration, because they're the only ones he encountered. To which I'll say: gosh that's a clever idea. *Smiles enigmatically.*

*

I really enjoyed writing this story. It could've been chaotic and wildly overstuffed, but I think the size and celebratory nature of it helped us avoid that. And it's an event release, you know? With scale and surprises and stonking great cliffhangers. It would be great to do something that epic again. *Smiles enigmatically again.*

*

Anyway, thank you for reading. If you enjoyed, **will you do me a favour?**

I was impersonated by someone online. Briefly. He said some silly things to people I know, and people I don't. One of my Big Finish WhatsApp groups (digital dens of vice and iniquity, the lot of them) sprung into action and let people know. And soon he was gone.

I laughed it off at the time, but I've had a lingering worry ever since. It's not just the 'oh shit, I hope people didn't think that was me' (with the heavily AIed profile picture too - I've never looked so shiny). But - by being off most social media - I had no way of letting people directly know that his dude wasn't me.

If you have friends who like my stuff, or just like audio drama in general - **will you get them to sign up to this newsletter?** I've realised that this is my horse's mouth and I should feed it more carrots. You are the carrots. But in exchange for me calling you vegetables, there will be treats galore, discussions about recent news announcements, teases about future projects… and if there's anything specific you want to know about my work, there are lots of ways here of asking me questions.

Type your email... Subscribe

THANK YOU. It is much appreciated. And the question I will leave you with is, will I write for the Fifth Doctor again? *Smiles enigmatically for one final time.*

Rips off his mask and it's the BRIGADIER

Rips off THAT mask and it's the MASTER

Rips off THAT mask and it's the - no wait that was my skin aaaARghh

9 Likes

Discussion about this post

Comments Restacks

Write a comment...